

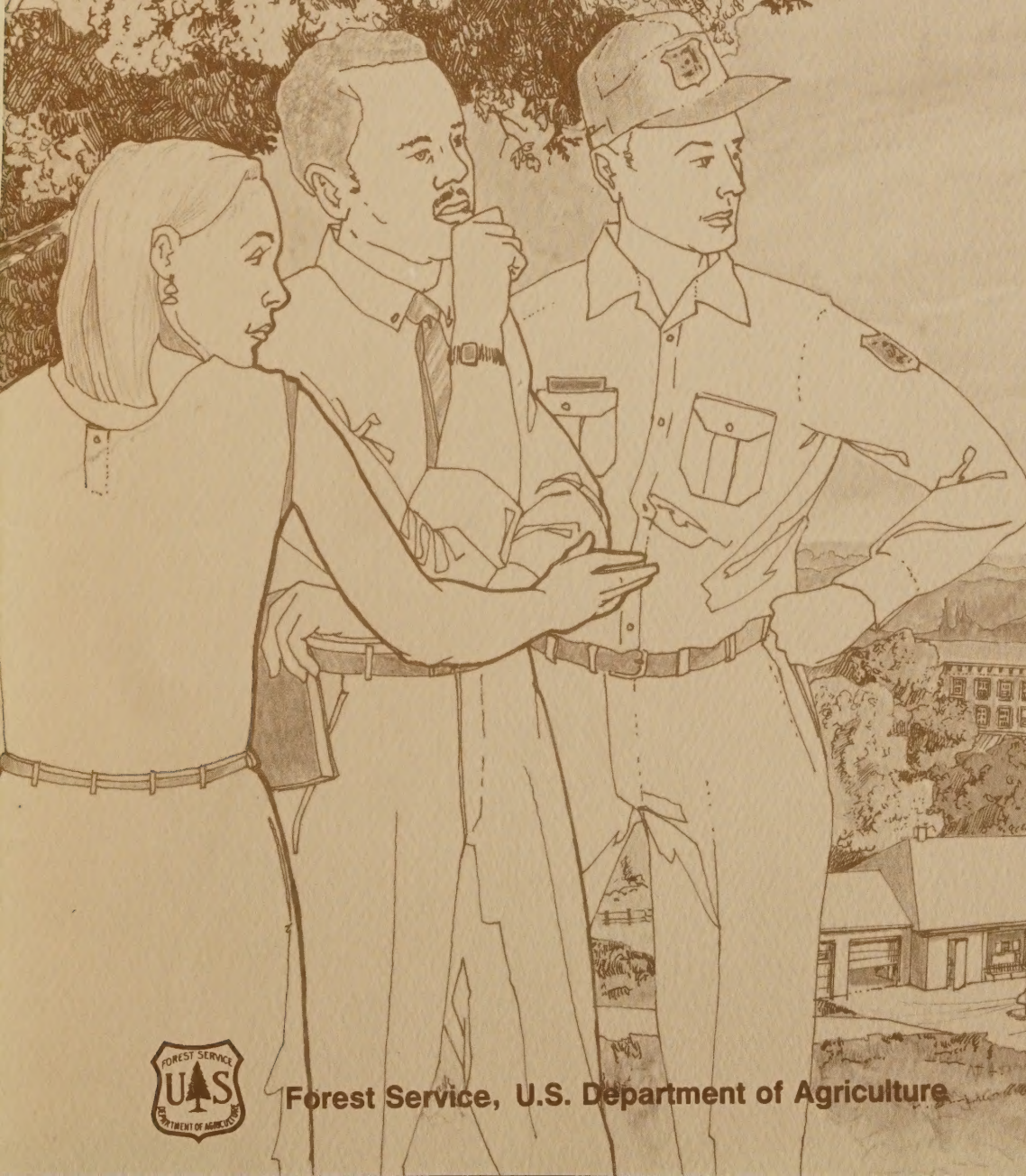
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ENHANCING RURAL AMERICA:

National Research Program



Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Washington
Office

14th & Independence SW
P.O. Box 96090
Washington, DC 20090-6090

Reply to: 3610
(FPHR)

Date: June 19, 1991

Subject: Enhancing Rural America, National Research Program

To: Regional Foresters, Station Directors, Area Director,
and WO Staff

I am pleased to share with you our national research program, Enhancing Rural America.

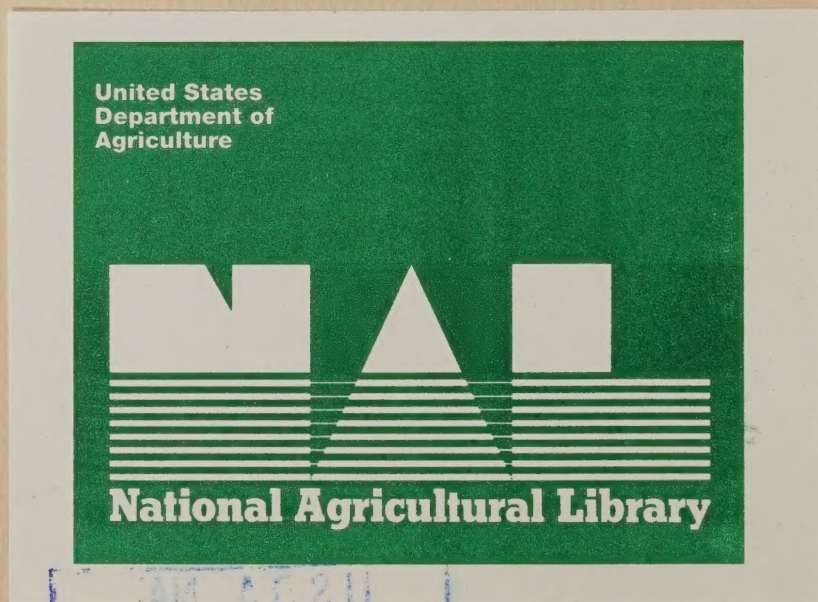
Forest Service Research has an important part to play in fulfilling the overall Forest Service role in helping rural America. The Forest Service has recently defined its role in rural development in the 1990 RPA Program and the Chief has discussed his commitment and described the Forest Service policy in A Strategic Plan for the 90s: Working Together for Rural America.

We intend to be full participants in providing the scientific and technological support for the overall Forest Service effort. This document supports our national strategic plan for research, and provides the framework for moving forward. We plan to use this document as broad guidance for our program, and also as a guide for developing annual budgets.

The thoughts in this document are a direct result of a Fall 1990 workshop attended by about 70 employees representing all branches of the Forest Service. It is aimed at developing a research program to enhance forest-based economies in rural America, and sets the stage for us to work within the Forest Service and with our external partners from States, Tribal Councils, and industry. By working together, we can help rural America.

Jerry A. SESCO

JERRY A. SESCO
Deputy Chief for Research



INTRODUCTION

The 1980s were hard on rural America. Businesses closed, entire towns died, and a valuable piece of our American heritage was lost. As grim as the statistics are on business closings and unemployment rates, the numbers fail to reflect the personal anguish felt by many rural Americans during the last decade.

Although rural America has many problems, rural communities are clearly not helpless. Many communities have taken effective steps to address their problems, but a serious obstacle to improving the situation in distressed communities is their small size. The federal government can play an important role in these communities. And the importance of rural communities to all Americans suggests that the federal government should work with communities to help themselves. These and other findings were reported by the National Commission on Agriculture and Rural Development Policy in *Future Directions in Rural Development Policy* in December 1990.

Given the rural situation, Secretary of Agriculture Clayton Yeutter sponsored during 1989 a forthright review of the USDA's approach to rural development. The Department has a long history of working with rural people and communities and has the statutory responsibility to coordinate rural development activities within the federal government. The review revealed several opportunities for improving the effectiveness of the USDA and its delivery through agency-level efforts and programs. Recommendations were made to, and accepted by, the Secretary and Under Secretary for Small Community and Rural Development. The recommendations were:

- Clarify the Department's commitment to rural development
- Strengthen coordination among rural programs
- Enhance the capacity for strategic action on rural issues
- Improve the ability of USDA to implement its rural programs.

On January 22, 1990, Secretary Yeutter announced for the White House a Presidential Initiative on Rural Economic Development. The Presidential Initiative resulted from a review of existing federal governmentwide rural development programs and policy options by the White House Economic Policy Council's Working Group on Rural Development.

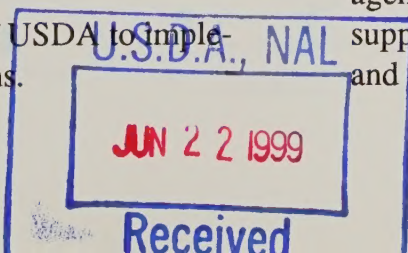
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Economic Policy Council (EPC), composed of representatives of Cabinet-level departments, is charged with advising the President on national economic policy matters. It is chaired by the Secretary of Treasury. A President's Council on Rural America, made up of various private-sector interests, also provides input to the President and the EPC on how the federal government can improve its rural economic development policy (fig. 1).

(Refer to the back of this report for a list of abbreviations.)

The EPC Working Group (WG) on Rural Development, chaired by the Secretary of Agriculture, also advises the EPC on rural development policy and program implementation. The Presidential Initiative makes the WG a permanent standing committee to implement national rural development initiatives. This Initiative also assures that relevant agencies cooperate and coordinate on rural development. The WG is made up of departments and independent agencies at the Cabinet and sub-Cabinet levels, with leadership provided by the USDA's Under Secretary for Small Community and Rural Development.

Within USDA there are a number of agencies with rural development responsibilities, including the Forest Service. The Forest Service currently participates in a variety of rural development activities, as presented in the agency's Rural Development Strategic Plan titled *A Strategic Plan for the '90s: Working Together for Rural America*. The agency also has the responsibility to involve and support the broader-based efforts of the Department and President.



The Forest Service's Strategic Plan provides the framework for a unified, agencywide approach to rural development, and presents an updated policy for focusing future efforts and strengthening the agency's contribution. National-level coordination across the agency is provided by the FS's Rural Development Steering Committee made up of the Associate Deputy Chiefs from each of the five Deputy Areas: State and Private Forestry (S&PF), National Forest System, Programs and Legislation, Administration, and Research. The Steering Committee, chaired by the Associate Deputy Chief for S&PF, is also responsible for monitoring and evaluating the Forest Service's efforts and progress.

Within Forest Service Research, a National Research Program called "Enhancing Rural America" (ERA) was established as an interdisciplinary approach to research activities (fig. 2). To foster and help ensure a balanced approach addressing the range of needs within rural America, national program coordination is charged to two Research staffs within the Forest Service's Washington Office: Forest Products and Harvesting Research (FPHR) and Forest Inventory, Economics and Recreation Research (FIERR). Implementation depends on the Forest Service's nine Research Stations for developing and carrying out a variety of research efforts. To facilitate this, key contacts have been identified at each Research Station.

Rural Development Executive Branch Organization

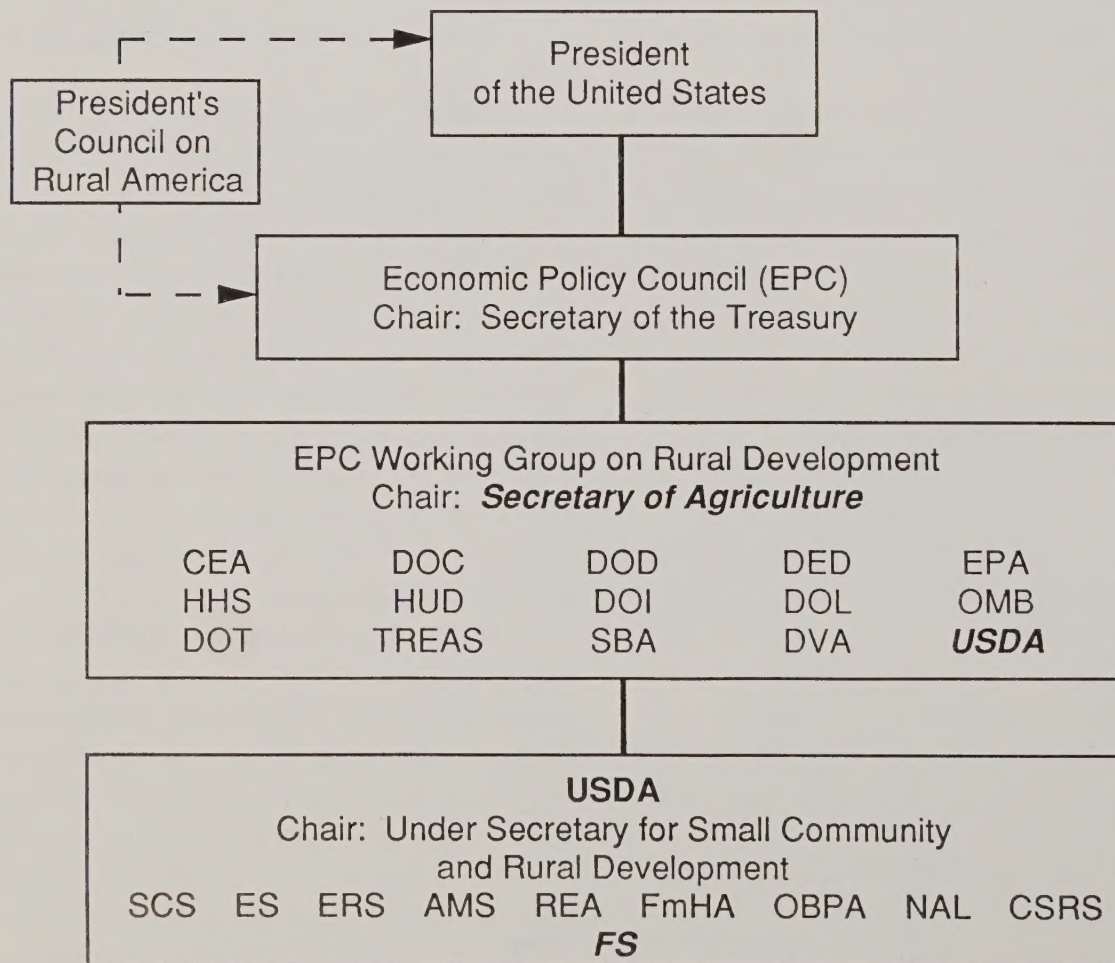


Figure 1

ENHANCING RURAL AMERICA

The Forest Service historically has been concerned with the vitality of rural communities (see Appendix I, Historical Perspective). From the statutory language in the Organic Act of 1897 to the more policy-based language in the 1990 RPA Program, the Forest Service has continued to show concern for rural communities. Its involvement has evolved, however, from a role of promoting community stability through timber production to one of helping communities attain their own goals, particularly through diversification efforts that recognize the value of all forest resources. The Forest Service has an opportunity to contribute to the long term well being of individual communities through a full array of resources and programs. The Forest Service explicitly states its policy in *A Strategic Plan for the '90s: Working Together for Rural America*, as: "The Forest Service will provide leadership in working with rural people and communities on developing natural-resource-based opportunities and enterprises that contribute to the economic and social vitality of rural communities. The Forest Service can make lasting improvements in rural America by helping people solve their local problems in ways that enhance the quality of the environment in accordance with our existing authorities."

Forest Service Research will provide the scientific and technological support for the Forest Service to carry out this policy. The focus of this effort is rural communities, and as such the research will be conducted with community and social vitality in mind and within the context of the value system of rural communities.

The magnitude and complexity of the rural development effort clearly indicates that cooperation and partnerships will be necessary for success.

External partners as well as all branches of the Forest Service will have to be involved, and each has a specific role to play. This document provides a framework for the Forest Service Research effort.

LINKAGE WITH OTHER FOREST SERVICE PLANNING EFFORTS

The following National Research Program builds on an existing foundation of planning within the Forest Service. The 1990 RPA Program, *The Forest Service Program for Forest and Rangeland Resources: A Long-Term Strategic Plan* provides the current conceptual framework for the overall Forest Service involvement in rural development. The Forest Service's future role is stated as, "Forest Service Research will increase efforts to provide information and technology on the resource-based

Rural Development
Forest Service Research Program

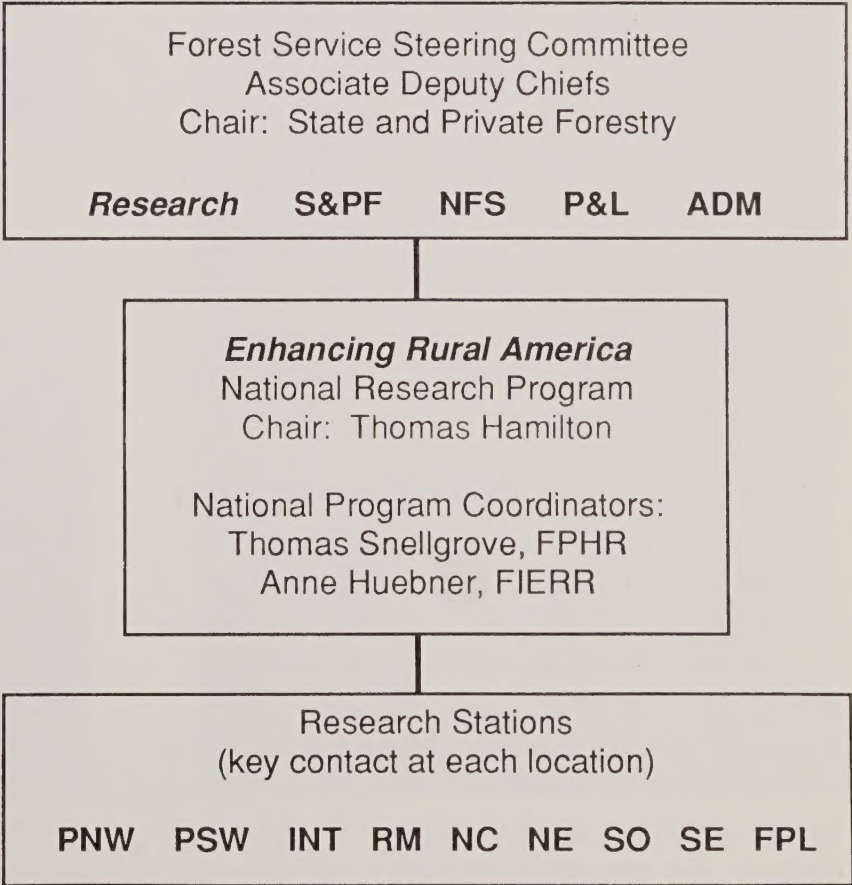


Figure 2

opportunities that can contribute to economic growth, and on the factors that affect the competitiveness of rural economies in the broader national and international markets within which they compete.”

Broad direction for the effort is provided in the Forest Service’s national plan for rural development, *A Strategic Plan for the '90s: Working Together for Rural America*. This document contains the Chief’s perspective, presents the Department of Agriculture’s and the President’s goals, and discusses the role of States and Tribal Governments. It provides the basis for coordinating the Forest Service program and the details of its policy.

General direction for Forest Service Research is described in the national strategic plan, *Strategies for the '90s for USDA Forest Service Research*. That plan describes three broad program components:

- Understanding Ecosystems
- Understanding People and Natural Resource Relationships
- Understanding and Expanding Resource Options

All three components of the strategic plan can contribute to the goal of revitalizing rural America. Information on ecosystems, people’s values and perceptions of natural resources, methodologies to assess socioeconomic factors, and innovative technologies for utilizing site specific resources will help rural communities make informed decisions on their future.

RATIONALE FOR THE PROGRAM

For almost 100 years, Forest Service laws, regulations, and initiatives have shown concern for the economic well being of communities. They provide a clear avenue for contributions from Forest Service Research to rural America. Among land-managing agencies, the Forest Service is in a unique position to conduct and lead this type of research. The geographic breadth of the organization, the ability to conduct research across the

entire spectrum of natural resources, relationships with National Forest Systems and State and Private Forestry, long-term program continuity, and existing partnerships all contribute to the capabilities of Forest Service Research in this area.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

To accomplish the objectives of the Forest Service’s rural development policy, additional information will be needed in five broad areas:

- Understanding the values and way of life of rural communities.
- Broadening economic opportunities and diversity by supporting business development and entrepreneurship.
- Supporting the physical and organizational infrastructure to meet community needs.
- Understanding the dynamics of resource, economic, social, and technological change in rural America.
- Understanding the institutional barriers and opportunities that affect rural communities.

Understanding the Values and Way of Life of Rural Communities

An improved understanding of rural communities and the intrinsic value that people place on a rural way of life will help ensure that the overall Forest Service effort is on target and will be accepted in rural communities (fig.3). The way rural people live and feel is central to what makes a place “rural” and is central to the goal of rural revitalization. Important rural values include neighborliness, volunteerism, work, and individual freedom and responsibility. Rural ways of life emphasize a sense of place with a close relationship to the land, seasons, and resources. Many well-intentioned efforts at “helping” rural communities have failed because organizations have not had a fundamental understanding of the preferences and patterns of the communities. Research must be responsive to the uniqueness of the lifestyles and values of each community. It must acknowledge

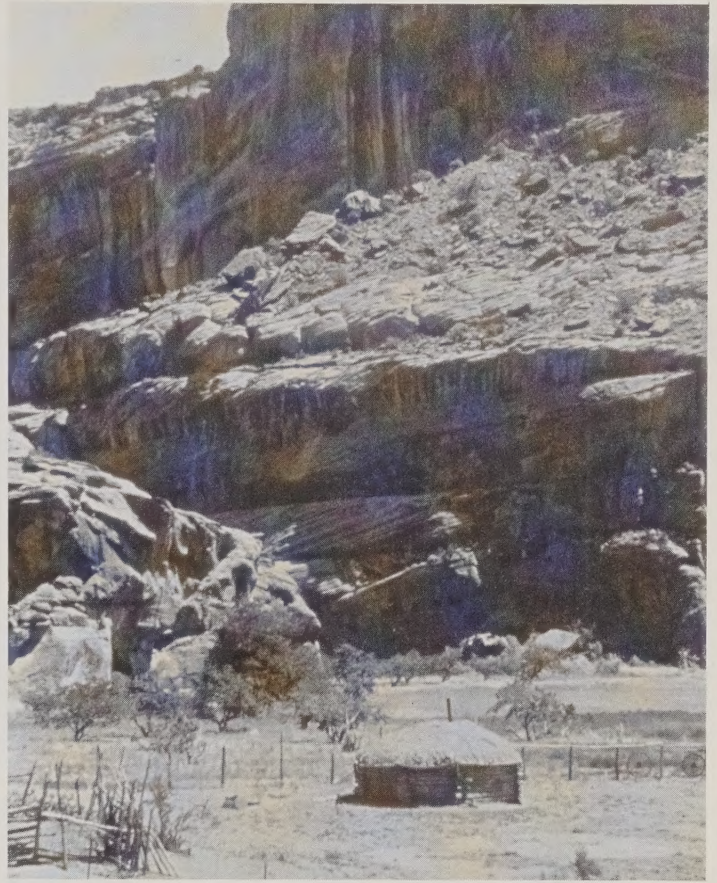
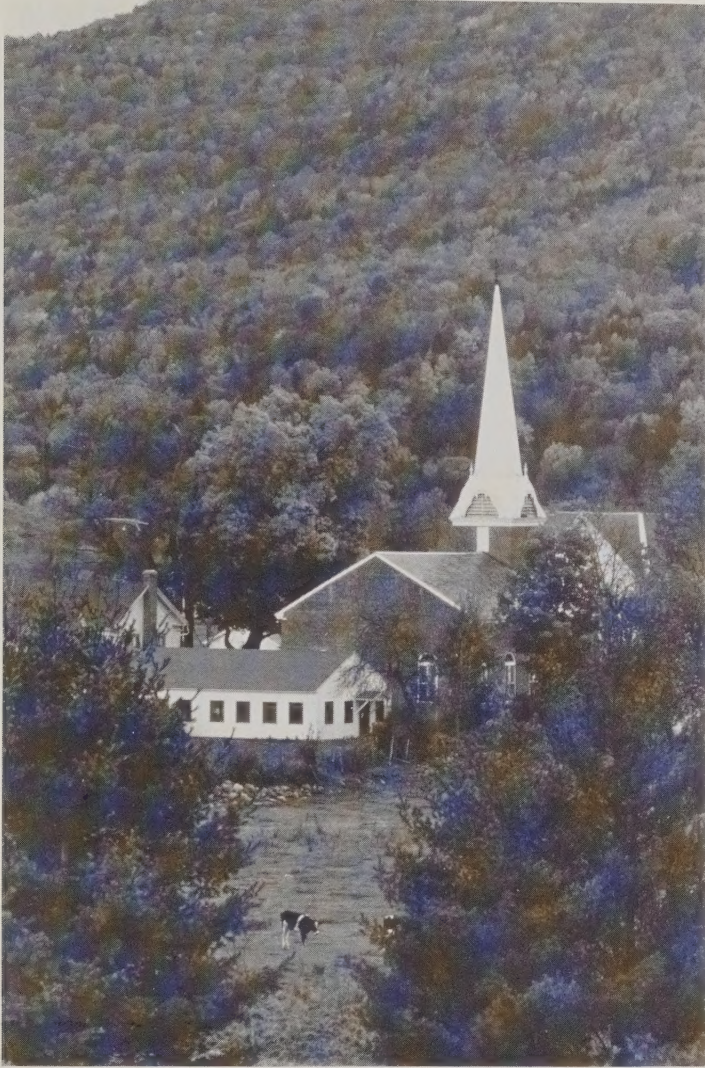


Figure 3: Not all rural communities and lifestyles are alike. Improved information is needed to provide a foundation for working with communities. Upper left and lower photos by J. Norman Reid. Upper right is U.S. Forest Service photo.

the diversity across our regions . . . from bush Alaska, Pacific Islands, timber and mill towns, and Indian tribes to communities of the urban/wildland interface.

Rural lifestyles, resource availability, and public and private resource management policies are inextricably linked. Research should help us understand how these lifestyles are shaped by resource availability and condition, and how they will respond to changes in the management of public and private resources.

Areas of research will include:

- Assessing, modifying, and evaluating the methodology for identifying the principal values and lifestyle elements of rural communities.
- Expanding our understanding of cultural differences and values.
- Determining how lifestyles and values are tied to resources, their condition, and trends in that condition.
- Assessing, modifying, and evaluating the techniques of introducing these concepts and techniques to Forest Service personnel and external partners.

Broadening Economic Opportunities and Diversity by Supporting Business Development and Entrepreneurship

Many natural-resource-based communities are affected by changes in traditional uses and demands for their resources (fig. 4). If communities want to develop their economies, the change should take place consistent with the views of people who live in the communities. Within this context the community has the opportunity to better utilize underemployed resources, produce more efficiently with new technology, or find some new good or service. This “real” economic development is preferable to simply competing with other communities for the same markets. A key objective of this area of research is to provide the scientific and technological basis to facilitate economic activity in local areas, thus creating more local income and

employment. This economic activity should be in the context of adding value at the local level, so that the aggregate national effect is a net gain in total wealth, not just a redistribution of existing wealth. If the activities don’t add net value, then the community is simply competing with other communities for the same limited resources.

There are a number of ways to “add value”: (1) reduce production costs in the local community, (2) develop local substitutes for imports, (3) increase utilization of underemployed resources and employ resources in their most highly valued use, (4) develop new products that use local resources and can be manufactured locally, and (5) discover and capitalize on new markets for local products.

This research should include non-commodity and amenity values as well as the more traditional commodity related opportunities. Recent research shows the highest and best use of some forests is non-commodity production. Even in forests well suited for commodity production, non-commodity products can be important sources of local revenue and contribute to national economic development.

Conservation of forest resources and improvement of recreation and scenic opportunity are important determinants of demand for forest recreation and tourism. Good stewardship and conservation are cornerstones for rural revitalization. In the long run, any effort that does not consider ecological sustainability will not ensure economic sustainability.

Forest Service Research is well positioned to contribute to the overall Forest Service effort by:

- Providing inventories of resources and doing resource analysis.
- Developing methods to determine what portion of rural values and economies are resource-related.
- Providing the technological basis for value-adding products ranging from sport fishing and recreation to wood products.
- Providing the basis for assessing the benefits and costs from economic diversification and from alternative uses of resources.



Figure 4: There is increasing recognition of the value of all forest resources. Upper and left photos by J. Norman Reid. Lower right photo by Jacquie Moreau.

Supporting Organizational and Physical Infrastructure to Meet Community Needs

Traditionally, infrastructure strategies have focused on the physical infrastructure needed to attract and support businesses and jobs, such as roads, bridges and water systems (fig. 5). Although the physical components remain an important concern, infrastructure needed for a growing, functioning community includes a much broader range of services and institutions. It includes, for instance, the services and institutions needed to develop human capital through education and training; those that assist and support private sector investments, especially those made by small businesses; and those that help entrepreneurs market their products and technologies. Enabling and inhibiting effects of infrastructure are crucial and vary by community. Thus Forest Service Research must work closely with rural communities and other key partners to:

- Identify the contribution of various parts of the infrastructure to the economy and society.
- Provide the technology necessary to assure clean water, energy, and affordable housing to enhance the quality of life.
- Determine how changes in infrastructure (social/physical) might affect local economic vitality.

Understanding the Dynamics of Resource, Economic, Social, and Technological Change in Rural America

Rural life is changing (fig. 6). Some of the changes are internal (family structure, family values, etc.) similar to those occurring in urban areas. Other changes, however, are imposed by external forces beyond community control (closing the local mill or listing a wildlife species as threatened or endangered). Other changes are nature-driven, such as changes in

ecosystems. Not all individuals, cultures, or communities cope with change similar to or as effectively as others. Less affluent people or those who have traditions tied closely to natural resources will likely be less mobile and more affected in times of change. This effort's focus is to improve understanding of these rural value systems in order to design acceptable actions. Studies will be designed to:

- Identify and anticipate changes and potential impacts on rural communities.
- Identify and evaluate how different communities and cultures usually respond to change, and identify ways to make the response more adaptive and effective.
- Provide information on how communities have dealt with or can deal with change.



Figure 5: Previous research has emphasized the opportunity to enhance employment and improve physical infrastructure through the use of timber bridges--additional emphasis will be given to socioeconomic infrastructure.



Figure 6: Change is inevitable; we need to understand how “successful” communities have adapted to their situation. The ski area in Alta, Utah (above) is one example.

Understanding the Institutional Barriers and Opportunities That Affect Rural Communities

Institutional arrangements present both barriers and opportunities to accomplishing objectives in rural development (fig. 7). These institutional characteristics may be internal or external to the Forest Service. Some of the more obvious characteristics internally relate to our own policies and regulations. Externally, building codes and zoning regulations, environmental regulations, and tax policies all influence the situation surrounding rural communities. For example, tax policies may well alter the comparative advantage (positively or negatively) for producing wood products in a particular local. Not all institutional characteristics

pose problems, some may offer valuable opportunities for helping rural people and economies. The objective of this particular area of research is to become more knowledgeable about institutional limits or benefits to Forest Service efforts in terms of delivery. Studies will be designed to:

- Identify and evaluate the effects of existing institutional arrangements such as regulations, codes, policies, and financial incentives.
- Evaluate changes in institutional arrangements that could enhance the revitalization of rural areas.
- Evaluate the effects of alternative tax policies on production alternatives.



Figure 7: Partnerships are generally accepted as a positive arrangement to accomplish community objectives. We need a better understanding of how other institutional factors affect rural communities. Photo by J. Norman Reid.

CRITERIA FOR PRIORITIZING RESEARCH

Prioritizing research is difficult under any circumstance. Different people simply have different opinions of what is important, and different information is needed in various situations.

Rather than establishing priorities on the research areas identified, proposed research will be evaluated and ranked according to the following criteria:

- The focus of the research should be consistent with the Forest Service mission by concentrating on land, natural resources and people.
- Results should be directly applicable to rural economies.
- Results should be transportable: broader-based methodologies that will apply to many situations are more desirable than unique methodologies that will apply to only one situation. A case-study approach is acceptable if done in partnership with other Forest Service efforts and if designed to facilitate comparison and generalization.
- Results should foster resource stewardship.
- At least initially, short-term research is preferred to long-term research. Long-term studies are not precluded, but the urgency of the situation in many communities demands early results.
- Research should involve potential users in design and application.
- Cooperative research involving partnerships is desirable.

APPENDIX I

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Federal Legislation—The Organic Administration Act of 1897 indicates that one purpose for establishing national forests was to “furnish a continuous supply of timber for the use and necessities of citizens of the United States.” The Sustained Yield Forest Management Act of 1944 mandated the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to “promote the stability of forest industries, of employment, of communities and of taxable forest wealth, through continuous supplies of timber...” This Act was the most significant piece of legislation attempting to protect and “stabilize” rural communities adjacent to federal forestland.

The National Forest Management Act of 1976 does not mandate any direction to supply resources specifically for the benefit of rural communities; however, Sec. 14(e)(2) directs a sealed bidding process. This direction renewed debate over community stability with the argument that sealed bidding opens the possibility that outside (the community area) firms may buy timber needed to supply local mills.

Federal Register and Regulations—The Federal Register provides direction to consider community stability in regional forest planning (1972) and conduct economic impact analysis (1982). Sociological definitions are referenced in Section 1970.5 and appear in the Forest Service Handbook 1909.17, Chapter 30.5. Community stability is defined more from an analytical rather than policy point of view:

A community's capacity to handle change without major hardships or disruptions to component groups or institutions. Measurement of community stability requires identification of the type and rate of proposed change and an assessment of the community's capacity to accommodate that level of change.

Similarly, the *Resource Planning Act 1985 Final Environmental Impact Statement* defines community stability as “the capacity to absorb and/or cope with change without major hardships to groups or institutions within the community.”

The 1986 *Code of Federal Regulations*, Chapter 36, 221.3(a)(3):71, states that management plans for national forest timber resources shall: “provide, so far as feasible, an even flow of national forest timber in order to facilitate the stabilization of communities and of opportunities for employment.”

Transitions of the Role from “Community Stability” to “Community Well-being” and “Rural Development”—Chapter 4 in the 1990 Forest Service Program for Forest and Rangeland Resource (RPA program) is entitled “Current and Future Roles: Foundation for Forest Service Programs.” The current and future roles of the Forest Service in contributing to rural development and the well-being of local economies are discussed under the heading of “Local Resource Management Roles.” Currently, “Forest Service research contributes to local...economic growth and diversification by providing information that all landowners can use to manage resources productively...cost-effectively...and efficiently” and improve “methods for estimating the effects of resource programs on local economies.” In future years, “Forest Service research will increase efforts to provide information and technology on resource-based opportunities [contributing to economic growth]...and on the factors that affect the competitiveness of rural economies in...national and international markets...”

In a 1989 response to Presidential and Departmental initiatives on Rural America, the Chief of the Forest Service established a National Rural Development Task Force and Steering Committee to review the Forest Service's rural development efforts. One result is “*A Strategic Plan for the '90s: Working Together for Rural America*,” which presents the Chief's six point working agenda. The following definition focuses the FS's effort on rural development:

“Rural development” is the management of human, natural, technical, and financial resources needed to improve living conditions, provide employment opportunities, enrich the cultural life, and enhance the environment of rural America. In the Forest Service, rural development is accomplished through partnerships.

APPENDIX II

The following Forest Service employees participated in the workshop titled, "Research Needed to Enhance Forest-Based Economies in Rural America" held in Denver, Colorado, on October 29-31, 1990. All participants were given an opportunity to review the first draft of the document; 20 were then specifically asked to provide a thorough technical review. These reviewers are shown in bold.

STATE AND PRIVATE FORESTRY:

John Crist
National Timber Bridge
Morgantown, WV

Bob Erwin
Cooperative Watershed, R-5
San Francisco, CA

Val Gannon
Cooperative Forestry, R-6
Portland, OR

Dean C. Graham
Cooperative Forestry, R-1
Missoula, MT

James W. Harvey
Resource Planner, R-4
Ogden, UT

Thomas Jordan, Jr.
Forest Resources Management
Northeast Area
Radnor, PA

Richard Kerr
Cooperative Forestry
Washington, DC

Charles F. Krebs
Cooperatiave Forestry, R-6
Portland, OR

George Lundy
New Forest Partnerships, R-9
Milwaukee, WI

Lew McCreery
Rural Development Coordinator
Northeast Area
Morgantown, WV

Ruth McWilliams
Cooperative Forestry
Washington, DC

Dennis Pendleton
Cooperative Fire Management, R-10
Anchorage, AK

Alan E. Pigg
Soil, Water, and Air, R-8
Atlanta, GA

Allen J. Schacht
Associate Deputy Chief
Washington, DC

Thomas G. Schmeckpeper
Director, S&PF and FPM, R-3
Albuquerque, NM

Mike Sharon
Forest Pest Management, R-2
Lakewood, CO

Robert B. Tippeconnic
Staff Assistant
Office of Deputy Chief
Washington, DC

Eugene E. Wheeler
Forest Management and Utilization, R-10
Anchorage, AK

Gerald L. Wicker
State Forest Resource Planning, R-8
Atlanta, GA

NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM:

Greg Alward
Land Management Planning
Fort Collins, CO

Karl Bergsvik
Timber Management Staff
Washington, DC

Mark Chaney
Klamath NF, R-5
Yreka, CA

Pablo Cruz
Carribean NF, R-8
Palmer, PR

Floyd Deloney
Minerals & Geology Management
Washington, DC

Leland Hanks
Timber Management, R-9
Milwaukee, WI

Y. Robert Iwamoto
Rochester RD
Green Mountain NF, R-9
Rochester, VT

Bob Randall
Wildlife and Fisheries Staff
Washington, DC

Denny Schweitzer
Land Management Planning
Washington, DC

Norman Sears
Engineering
Washington, DC

David Spann
New Meadows RD

Payette NF, R-4
New Meadows, ID

G. Richard Wetherill
Sociologist, R-6
Portland, OR

ADMINISTRATION:

Bill Anthony
Computer Sciences & Telecommunication
Washington, DC

David Miller
Information Systems
Washington, DC

Vertis Stovall, Jr.
Human Resource Programs
Washington, DC

PROGRAMS AND LEGISLATION:

Peter G. Ashton
Policy Analysis Staff
Washington, DC

John DeVilbiss
PP&B, R-2
Lakewood, CO

John "Pat" Halligan
PP&B, R-2
Lakewood, CO

Adrian Haught
Resources and Program Assessment
Washington, DC

Arnold G. Holden
Environmental Coordination
Washington, DC

Paul Monson
PP&B, R-9
Milwaukee, WI

Walter L. Stewart
PD&B, R-3
Albuquerque, NM

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE:

John Denne
Public Affairs Office
Washington, DC

RESEARCH:

Enoch F. Bell
Pacific Southwest Station
Berkeley, CA

Kent P. Connaughton
Pacific Northwest Research Station
Portland, OR

Kenneth Cordell
Southeastern Research Station
Athens, GA

Donald F. Dennis
Northeastern Research Station
Burlington, VT

Linda R. Donoghue
FFASR Staff
Washington, DC

John F. Dwyer, Jr.
North Central Research Station
Chicago, IL

Alan W. Green
Intermountain Research Station
Ogden, UT

Thomas E. Hamilton
Associate Deputy Chief
Washington, DC

Robert H. Hamre
Research Information
Rocky Mountain Research Station
Fort Collins, CO

H. Fred Kaiser, Jr.
FIERR Staff
Washington, DC

Claire Kinlaw
Pacific Southwest Research Station
Berkeley, CA

Richard G. Krebill
Intermountain Research Station
Ogden, UT

William J. Lange
Forest Products Laboratory
Madison, WI

David C. Lothner
North Central Research Station
St. Paul, MN

George L. Peterson
Rocky Mountain Research Station
Fort Collins, CO

Timothy Rials
Southern Forest Research Station
Pineville, LA

Joseph R. Saucier
Southeastern Forest Research Station
Athens, GA

Erwin L. Schaffer
Forest Products Laboratory
Madison, WI

William C. Siegel
Southern Forest Research Station
New Orleans, LA

Thomas Snellgrove
FPHR Staff
Washington, DC

J. Michael Vasievich
North Central Research Station
East Lansing, MI

H. Gus Wahlgren
Forest Products Laboratory
Madison, WI

David N. Wear
Southeastern Research Station
Research Triangle Park, NC

Susan A. Willits
Pacific Northwest Research Station
Portland, OR

Margaret Thomas
Midwest Research Institute
Kansas City, MO

Jacque Tisdale
Southern Rural Development Center
Mississippi State University
Starkville, MS

Russell Youmans
Western Rural Development Center
Oregon State University
Corvallis, OR

Roland Vautour
Office of the Under Secretary
Small Community and Rural Development
Washington, DC

EXTERNAL PARTNERS:

James E. Hubbard
State Forester
Colorado State Forest Service
Fort Collins, CO

Peter Korsching
North Central Ctr. for Rural Devel.
Iowa State University
Ames, IA

Richard Long
Agriculture & Rural Economy Div.
Economic Research Service
Washington, DC

Joanne Parsons
NE Regional Ctr. for Rural Develop.
Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA

George Siehl
Congressional Research Service
Library of Congress
Washington, DC

ABBREVIATIONS

ADM	Administration
AMS	Agriculture Marketing Service
CEA	Council of Economic Advisers
CSRS	Cooperative State Research Service
DED	Department of Education
DOC	Department of Commerce
DOD	Department of Defense
DOI	Department of Interior
DOL	Department of Labor
DOT	Department of Transportation
DVA	Department of Veterans Affairs
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EPC	Economic Policy Council
ERS	Economic Research Service
ES	Extension Service
FIERR	Forest Inventory, Economics, and Recreation Research
FmHA	Farmers Home Administration
FPHR	Forest Products and Harvesting Research
FPL	Forest Products Laboratory
FS	USDA Forest Service
FSR	Forest Service Research
HHS	Health and Human Services
HUD	Housing and Urban Development
INT	Intermountain Research Station
NAL	National Agriculture Library
NC	North Central Research Station
NE	Northeastern Research Station
NFS	National Forest System
OBPA	Office of Budget and Program Analysis (USDA)

OMB	Office of Management and Budget
P&L	Programs and Legislation
PNW	Pacific Northwest Research Station
PSW	Pacific Southwest Research Station
REA	Rural Electrification Agency
RM	Rocky Mountain Research Station
S&PF	State and Private Forestry
SBA	Small Business Administration
SCS	Soil Conservation Service
SE	Southeastern Research Station
SO	Southern Research Station
TREAS	Department of Treasury
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture

